

Authenticity of the Ḥadīth: Command Your Children to Pray When They Are Seven...

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Question: What is the authenticity of the ḥadīth:

مُرُوا أَوْلَادَكُمْ (صِبْيَانَكُمْ) بِالصَّلَاةِ وَهُمْ أَبْنَاءُ سَبْعِ سِنِينَ، وَاضْرِبُوهُمْ عَلَيْهَا وَهُمْ أَبْنَاءُ عَشْرِ سِنِينَ، وَفَرِّقُوا بَيْنَهُمْ فِي الْمَضَاجِعِ

Command your children to pray when they are seven years old, and hit them for it (if they don't pray) when they are ten years old, and separate between them in their beds.

Answer: This narration comes by the way of a number chains with slightly different wordings, but all with the same meaning. We will discuss the various narrations here to give a clear understanding as to the authenticity of this ḥadīth – إن شاء الله

1. **`Abd-ul-Lāh ibn `Amr ibn al-`Āṣ:** This was reported by Ibn Abī Shaybah, Aḥmad, Abū Dāwūd, ad-Dāraquṭnī, al-Ḥākim, and al-Bayhaqī, all by way of Sawwār ibn Dāwūd al-Muzanī, from `Amr ibn Shu`ayb, from his father (Shu`ayb ibn Muḥammad), from his grandfather `Abd-il-Lāh ibn `Amr ibn al-`Āṣ (رضي الله عنهما) from the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم.¹

With regard to Sawwār ibn Dāwūd, Ibn Ma`īn classed him as *thiqah* (trustworthy), but this is regarding his uprightness and not his precision in narrating *aḥādīth*.² This is clear as others weakened him in this. Ad-Dāraquṭnī said, “No one follows him in his *aḥādīth*, so he is considered” – meaning if others narrate similar to him. Ibn Ḥibbān mentioned him in *Ath-Thuqāt* and said, “He makes mistakes.” And he also mentioned him in *Al-Majrūhīn* and said, “He is alone in narrating, though he narrates little. And his narrations do not resemble those who narrate from them,” and then he mentioned this ḥadīth. Ahmad said, “He is a *shaykh*, no harm (comes from narrating from him).” So the best that can be said about Sawwār ibn Dāwūd is that he makes mistakes, and there is no harm in accepting his narrations if others follow him. As for relying solely on his *aḥādīth*, then he is not acceptable as a narrator.

There is another *isnād* to `Amr ibn Shu`ayb, from his father, from his grandfather, which comes by the way of Khalīl ibn Murrah, from al-Layth ibn Sulaym as reported by

¹ See *Muṣannaf Ibn Abī Shaybah* (3505), *Musnad Aḥmad* (6689), *Sunan Abī Dāwūd* (495), *Sunan Ad-Dāraquṭnī* (876), *Al-Mustadrak `alaṣ-Ṣaḥīḥayn* (711), and *As-Sunan al-Kubrā* (2968)

² I asked *shaykh* al-Ḥārith ibn `Alī al-Ḥasanī about the statement of Yaḥyā ibn Ma`īn concerning Sawwār ibn Dāwūd al-Muzanī, and he said this is concerning his *`adālah* (uprightness) and not his *dhabṭ* (precision in narrating).

al-Bayhaqī.³ As for Khalīl ibn Murrah, Abū Ḥātim ar-Rāzī said, “He is a righteous man, not strong in ḥadīth.” Aṭ-Ṭayālīsī said, “He is misguided and misguides.” Ibn Ḥibbān mentioned him in *Adh-Dhu`afā`*, and an-Nasā`ī said he is *dha`īf* (weak). Al-Bukhārī said, “He narrates *munkar* (meaning atrocious *aḥādīth*).”

Concerning al-Layth ibn Sulaym, then he is weak as well. Al-Ḥākim said, “There is consensus concerning his atrocious memory.” Al-Bayhaqī said, “He is not strong.” And he also said, “He is not relied upon.” Aḥmad said, “There is *idḥṭirāb* (confusion) in his *aḥādīth*, however the people used to write them.” And he said, “One should not be pleased with his narrations.” An-Nasā`ī said he is weak, and Yaḥyā ibn Ma`īn said he is *munkar* (atrocious) *al-ḥadīth*.

Seeing the severity of the weakness in the second *isnād*, it becomes clear that the *isnād* of Sawwār ibn Dāwūd cannot be strengthened to the level of acceptability.

2. **Anas ibn Mālik:** This was reported by ad-Dāraqūṭnī by way of Dāwūd ibn al-Muḥabbar, from `Abd-il-Lāh ibn al-Muthannā, from Thumāmah ibn `Abd-il-Lāh, from Anas ibn Mālik in *marfū`* form (meaning from the Prophet – صلى الله عليه وسلم).⁴ And it was also reported by aṭ-Ṭabarānī by way of Dāwūd ibn al-Muḥabbar, from his father (Muḥabbar ibn Qaḥṭham), from Thumāmah, from Anas in *marfū`* form.⁵

Dāwūd ibn al-Muḥabbar is abandoned when it comes of *aḥādīth*. Ibn al-Jawzī said, “He fabricates *aḥādīth*.” Abū Ḥātim ar-Rāzī said, “He is gone when it comes to ḥadīth; not trustworthy.” Al-Bukhārī said, “He looks like he is nothing. He doesn’t know what a ḥadīth is.” Aḥmad said, “He is a liar.” An-Nasā`ī said, “He is weak.” And he also said, “*Matrūk* (abandoned).” Concerning his father, Muḥabbar ibn Qaḥṭham, then he is *majhūl* (unknown) at best if not weak according to al-`Uqaylī.

3. **Abū Hurayrah:** This was reported by Ibn Abīd-Dunyā by way of Muḥammad ibn Rabī`ah, from Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-`Awfī, from Muḥammad ibn `Abd-ir-Raḥmān al-Madanī, from Abī Hurayrah in *marfū`* form.⁶ Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-`Awfī is weak as mentioned by Abū Ḥātim ar-Rāzī. Al-Bukhārī said, “His *aḥādīth* are not acceptable.” And Ibn Ḥibbān said, “He is *munkar al-ḥadīth*.”

Another *isnād* to Abī Hurayrah can be found from Shu`ayb ibn Wāqid al-Harawī, from Abd-il-Mun`im ibn Nu`aym ar-Riyāḥī, from al-A`mash, from Abī Šāliḥ, from Abī Hurayrah in *marfū`* form, as reported by Ibn Ḥibbān.⁷ `Abd-ul-Mun`im ibn Nu`aym is *matrūk*. Abū Ḥātim ar-Rāzī and al-Bukhārī said, “He is *munkar al-ḥadīth*.” An-Nasā`ī said, “He is not trustworthy.” And ad-Dāraqūṭnī said, “He is *matrūk*.”

4. **Sabrah ibn Ma`bad:** This was reported by Ibn Abī Shaybah, Aḥmad, ad-Dārimī, Abū Dāwūd, at-Tirmithī, Ibn Khuzaymah, ad-Dāraqūṭnī, aṭ-Ṭabarānī, al-Ḥākim, and al-

³ *As-Sunan al-Kubrā* (2971)

⁴ *Sunan ad-Dāraqūṭnī* (880)

⁵ *Al-Mu`jam al-Awsaṭ* (4129)

⁶ *Kitāb-ul-`Iyāl* (301)

⁷ *Al-Majrūḥīn* (1015)

Bayhaqī, all by way of Abd-il-Melik ibn ar-Rabī` ibn Sabrah, from his father (ar-Rabī` ibn Sabrah), from Sabrah ibn Ma`bad in *marfū`* form.⁸

Muslim narrated from `Abd-il-Melik ibn ar-Rabī` in *mutāba`ah* (follow-up) form, but did not rely on him. Al-`Ijlī classed him as *thiqah*, but he is lenient in his classifications. If we look at those who are more reliable in their classifications, we will see that they weakened his status significantly. Yaḥyā ibn Ma`īn was asked about the narrations of `Abd-il-Melik ibn ar-Rabī`, from his father, from his grandfather, and he said, “They are weak.” And he said concerning `Abd-il-Melik himself, “He is weak.” Ibn Ḥibbān said, “He is extremely *munkar* in ḥadīth.”

5. **`Abd-ul-Lāh al-Khath`amī:** This was reported by Abū Nu`aym by way of Ḥammād ibn Khālid, from Muḥammad ibn `Ubayd-il-Lāh, from Abū Yaḥyā (Zakariyyā ibn Khālid ibn Maymūn), from `Amr ibn `Abd-il-Lāh, from his father, `Abd-ul-Lāh al-Khath`amī in *marfū`* form.⁹ This *isnād* is extremely weak. Muḥammad ibn `Ubayd-il-Lāh is *matrūk*. Abū Zur`ah ar-Rāzī said, “His *aḥādīth* are not to be written.” Abū Ḥātim ar-Rāzī said, “He is extremely weak.” Al-Ḥākim said, “He is *matrūk al-ḥadīth* without any dispute I know of concerning him from those who transmit (narrations).” And he was also classed as *matrūk* by Aḥmad and an-Nasā`ī. And `Amr ibn `Abd-il-Lāh is *majhūl*.

6. **Muḥammad ibn `Abd-ir-Raḥmān (Ibn Abī `Ā`ishah):** This was reported by Ibn Abīd-Dunyā by way of Ḥumayd ibn `Abd-ir-Raḥmān, from Ḥasan ibn Šālīḥ, from Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan, from Muḥammad ibn `Abd-ir-Raḥmān, from the Messenger of Allāh (عليه السلام).¹⁰ We have already discussed the case of Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-`Awfī and he is weak (see the discussion on the first *isnād* for the narration attributed to Abī Hurayrah). Furthermore, Ibn Abī `Ā`ishah is a *Tābi`ī*, and did not hear directly from the Messenger of Allāh (صلى الله عليه وسلم), so the *isnād* is *mursal* as well as *dha`īf*.

In summary: This narration, which can be found in many books of *fiqh* and is mentioned by many in their sermons and lessons is weak. The best of the chains to this ḥadīth is that attributed to `Abd-ul-Lāh `Amr ibn al-`Āš (رضي الله عنهما) by way of Sawwār ibn Dāwūd, but his narrations cannot be accepted without support. The severity of the weaknesses found in all the other chains to this ḥadīth prevent the strengthening of his narration to the level of acceptability, so this statement cannot be confirmed to be from the words of the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم).

When it comes to when it is required to teach children how to pray, there is nothing confirmed from the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم), nor am I aware of anything authentic from the *Ṣaḥābah* – though there are narrations. We will find that the *salaf* differed concerning this, some saying when they reach the age of seven, others say when they know their right hand from their left hand, and others say when they can count to twenty – these are just a few of some

⁸ *Muṣannaf ibn Abī Shaybah* (3504), *Musnad Aḥmad* (15339), *Sunan ad-Dārimī* (1431), *Sunan Abī Dāwūd* (494), *Jāmi` at-Tirmithī* (407), *Ṣaḥīḥ Ibn Khuzaymah* (949), *Sunan ad-Dāraquṭnī* (875), *al-Mu`jam al-Kabīr* (6546), *Al-Mustadrak `alaṣ-Ṣaḥīḥayn* (951), and *As-Sunan al-Kubrā* (4684)

⁹ *Ma`rifat-uṣ-Ṣaḥābah* (4591)

¹⁰ *Al-`Iyāl* (295)

of the opinions. Accountability for the prayer is only when *bulūgh* (puberty) is reached, so without a doubt, the importance of the prayer and how to pray must be emphasized before this age is reached so that when the time comes, they know how to pray and do not miss any. As for disciplining the child before *bulūgh* is reached, then again, this cannot be confirmed as a statement from the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم), and the matter is open and up to the discretion of the parents/guardians of the child.

هذا والله أعلم

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